



The Aruban Jewish Community observes Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day

It has been sixty years since the horrors of The Holocaust were finally ended, and what Jews survived either emigrated from Europe or tried to rebuild their lives. For present generations this may be considered ancient history. For the Jewish people, whose lives and faith are shaped by their history of persecution, and their deliverance from oppression, the lessons to be learned from The Holocaust are typified in the words “Never Forget!”

There is a saying, “those that do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” These watchwords have a great deal to do with the creation of Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. It is a day to fight against ignorance with education and against disbelief with proof, as it is so hard for present generations to believe that such an evil as The Holocaust could ever have taken place, indeed, there are those that are “Holocaust deniers,” who hotly contend that it is a fiction, a Zionist plot. There are still survivors that lived with starvation, humiliation and terror, and their children, that might argue that point.

Once a year, Jews around the world gather to discuss and give thanks in their own way for their freedom to worship and their blessing from God that they can do so without fear. Mostly they gather to remember and remind each other of who and what they are, and how, despite the horrors of what has passed, they have still kept true to their faith. This is the faith of their parents and grandparents, and so many that died for simply being born Jewish, or even though having converted to Christianity, they had Jewish blood.

Jewish history is long and filled with many stories of slavery and freedom, sorrow and joy, persecution and redemption. The Hebrew calendar is filled with varied holidays that incorporate and reiterate the history and tradition of the Jewish people. After the horrors of the Holocaust, Jews wanted a day to memorialize this tragedy. The Holocaust in reality spanned nearly a decade, with suffering and death spread throughout these years of terror, so it was difficult to choose one particular day, and many were suggested. The Zionists in Israel, many of whom had fought in the ghettos or as partisans, wanted to commemorate the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising - April 19, 1943. However, this date on the Hebrew calendar is the 15th of Nissan - the beginning of Passover, a very important and happy holiday. Orthodox Jews objected to this date.

For two years, this was a subject of hot debate until in 1950 compromises and bargaining began. Holocaust Remembrance Day is decided by the Jewish Calendar, and falls on the same day every year, the 27th of Nissan, which is beyond Passover but within the time span of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Orthodox Jews still did not like this date because it established a day of mourning within the traditionally happy month of Nissan. As a final effort to compromise, it was decided that if the 27th of Nissan would affect Shabbat (fall on Friday or Saturday), then it would be moved to the following Sunday.

On April 12, 1951, the Knesset (Israel's parliament) proclaimed Yom Hashoah U'Mered HaGetaot; Holocaust and Ghetto Revolt Remembrance Day. This year that fell on April 25. The Jewish day begins at sunset, so members of the Temple Beth Israel Synagogue gathered there on Monday evening, April 24th, to read the testimony of Holocaust survivors, and to sing the Hatikva, the National Anthem of Israel, which means “Hope.” Led by Rabbi Bater, they said a prayer for all those that suffered, and six women from the congregation were called to the bema to light a candle for each of the million of the six million Jews that died in the death camps.

Afterwards, the group gathered in the social hall to watch the film “The Wave,” the recounting of an actual experiment by Ron Jones, who was teaching at Cubberley High School in Palo Alto, California, when he performed the “Third Wave” experiment. Ron had a Jewish mother and Catholic father. The film was a retelling of his experience of how easily a Nazi mentality can take hold of a high school class that could not understand how people could stand idly by and allow the willful destruction of entire people. This true story of his experience later won him the Peabody Award for Journalism and a Pulitzer Prize nomination, and was made into a TV movie in 1981 starring well-known actor Bruce Davison.

Yom Hashoah is not only a day to mourn the loss of one particular group of people, it is a day to remind the world that the mentality and consequences of ignorance, bigotry, and hate are easily invoked, as the headlines prove to us everyday. It is to remind the world, not only Jews, to be vigilant against these evils, and not complacent in thinking it could never happen again, as it has happened, in Africa, in Croatia, and many other places. It may not have happened to the Jewish people of the world, but everywhere innocent people are being exterminated simply for being born a certain tribe or faith. “Evil happens when good people do nothing,” is a phrase to also live by, aside from the words “Never Forget!”

